

Thursday 14th December 2006

The trouble with obsession is that it holds a cyclic energy. December is the month of Christmas. As a member of a choir December is a busy month. Thursday 14th December 2006 was the day of the Wyresdale Christmas concert, the one concert that I annually arrange and promote.

I have had a fondness for sound recording throughout my life and an opportunity had arisen. I should try to record the concert as best I could. My aim was to have four microphones to capture the sound. I don't have the capability to mix at source, especially at the same time as singing, so my plan was to capture two audio files from two devices: USB to laptop and little Edirol WAV recorder. This was almost the best I could do. Then later I could mix the audio files to enhance the sound.

Paul had asked if I could be aware of the audience with the placing of microphones. He didn't want the aisle obstructed or sight of the choir restricted. My answer was not without problems. I needed to put together a microphone support that I could lower from the church beams, that I could lower during the interval in order to change the Compact Flash card. Luckily I had a wooden frame. Two condenser Microphones were placed on either side of Paul, at head height, and fed via a mixer into the Vaio, concealed to the far side, by the Basses.

With all things set ready to record, at 4 o'clock I left the church to walk through the grave yard to the back of the church to turn on the boiler. It would be bleak tonight - the weather was changing; the wind was picking up. It was important that people who made the effort to come and hear us sing didn't come to a cold church. It was going to be a night to be inside. As a date, 14th December is not an ideal night to try to pull people out of their cosy warm homes.

The Shepherd's church, Abbeystead, isn't too easy to find and getting there is always a trial, with miles of black, turning, Lancashire lanes.

As I had the church key the rush was on. We parked the car right up by the gate. My hurriedness overcame my cordiality. I sped off leaving Helen alone in the darkness. I could hear people through the gusty darkness. They were agitated, cold and wanting to get into the church. I tried to open the door to the Vestry but was beaten to it by one of the elderly Ladies of Wyresdale. 'Why wasn't the church open?' she demanded. 'It should have been open.'

Oh dear, not a good start. The heating hadn't worked. The church was cold. I hurried through the church to open the main door and in fell thirty or so people expecting to get into a warm church. I raced off with Roy, the Vicar, to the boiler hut. The boiler wasn't working. I returned to the church, turned the recorders on, pulled the wooden frame up towards the beams and stood with my fellow basses ready to sing.

'Does anyone have a Honda?' asked Kirsty. The car was blocking the wheel chair access for her Mum. 'My car!' I thought, 'I might be some while ...' was the thing to say, but what came out was 'Do start without me' I came back in on the second song, *Hark, What Celestial Sounds*, and proceeded to forget my Bass entry. Too much was happening. My concentration slipped and Jasper wasn't present.

This investigation into digital audio recording has been brought about by capturing the creative energy of a large number of people: The Gladly Solemn Sound, a Lancaster based choir; its musical director, Paul Guppy; and Simon Booth on melodion. Also, it is most importantly that I mention my dear Helen, whose support, musical energy and editing skills made this happen.

One-take Steve would like to present from a cold and windy Lancashire December night.

Please Click the image for a recording of the concert:

